

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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DUCK HUNTERS URGED TO "SPARE THE HEN"

Duck hunters are being urged to "spare the hen," particularly the mallard hen, during the coming waterfowl season, the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife announced today.

"We are going to encourage hunters to shoot greenheads instead of mallard hens whenever possible," Bureau Director John S. Gottschalk said.

Dr. Gottschalk said that male mallards outnumber females, but that the distaff population is most crucial to breeding success.

An experimental drakes-only season in a high plains area of Wyoming, Montana, and Colorado will be held after the main migration has departed and mostly greenheads remain.

The Bureau, the Wildlife Management Institute, and the Mississippi Flyway Council are cooperating with the University of Wisconsin in testing hunter ability and motivation related to the problem of selective shooting in the Mississippi Flyway.

Of all the mallards killed in the United States last year, 60 percent were drakes. If the percentage increases to 65 this season and the total mallard kill comes to an expected 3,000,000, as many as 250,000 mallards could be added to next year's flight, the Bureau estimates.

Mallards have one of the least unbalanced sex ratios, yet as much as 56 percent of this fall's flight may be "greenheads." Some surplus drakes may be essential to this species' production success, but during high production years in the 1950's the disparity between drakes and hens was considerably less than now.

"Although we can count on 'extra' drakes in this fall's migration, too many unknowns exist to throw the doors wide open to drake harvesting," Dr. Gottschalk said. "We have learned from special seasons on teal, black ducks, scaup, white geese and last year's closure on mallards in Manitoba that hunters cannot be depended upon to take mallard drakes exclusively."

